United Nations A/64/PV.80

General Assembly
Sixty-fourth session

Official Records

80th plenary meeting
Thursday, 25 March 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki ..... (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Hackett (Barbados), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 7 (*continued*)

Organization of work, adoption of the agenda and allocation of items

The Acting President: Members will recall that the General Assembly concluded its consideration of agenda item 116, entitled "Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade", at its 47th plenary meeting, on 16 November 2009. In order for the Assembly to consider the draft decision before it today in document A/64/L.50, it will be necessary to reopen the consideration of agenda item 116.

May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to reopen its consideration of agenda item 116?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 116 (*continued*)

Follow-up to the commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade

Draft decision (A/64/L.50)

The Acting President: We shall now proceed to consider draft decision A/64/L.50. In connection with the draft decision, I now give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat to make a statement.

Mr. Nakano (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): This oral statement is made in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly.

Under the terms of the operative paragraph of draft decision A/64/L.50, the General Assembly would decide to convene, on 25 March 2010, a special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. It is envisaged that the special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly to be held on 25 March 2010 would comprise one meeting, with simultaneous interpretation from, and into, all six official languages. Although the meeting has not been included in the calendar of conferences and meetings of the United Nations for 2010 and constitutes an addition to the calendar, it has been determined that the required resources for servicing the meeting could be accommodated by using the resources allocated for servicing the General Assembly, provided that the Assembly does not meet at the same time when the special commemorative meeting is held.

Consequently, should the draft decision be adopted by the General Assembly, there would be no programme budget implications for the biennium 2010-2011.

The Acting President: I thank the representative of the Secretariat for his clarifying statement.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

10-29094 (E)

Please recycle

The Assembly will now take action on draft decision A/64/L.50, entitled "Special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft decision A/64/L.50?

Draft decision A/64/L.50 was adopted.

Special commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision just taken, the General Assembly will now hold a special commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The President of the General Assembly has had to travel. He has given me the task, in my capacity as Acting President of the Assembly, of reading out a statement on his behalf. I have the honour to deliver the following statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, President of the General Assembly.

> "We are gathered here today for the third annual International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This commemoration by the General Assembly signifies the international community's respect and honour for the millions of Africans who were violently removed from the African continent and transferred to centuries of bondage in North and South America and in the islands of the Caribbean.
>
> "The Durban Conference against Racism firmly established the transatlantic slave trade as the greatest scourge of modern life and a grotesque crime against humanity. Today is an occasion not only to enhance awareness about the past, but also to make a commitment that never again should human beings display such inhumanity towards other human beings. The United Nations must indeed continue to deploy all efforts in order to bridge the knowledge gap. Major historical events and facts that have now been ascertained cannot continue to be ignored. Ignorance and concealment are obstacles to peace and dialogue. The United Nations, including UNESCO, must be vocal and visible on this issue and help break the silence that still surrounds the many tragic aspects of slavery and the slave trade.
>
> "I commend the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the African Group for taking the lead on this annual commemoration. All of us fully embrace this initiative and, with one voice, pay homage to the victims, say 'no' to this horrific act of oppression and call attention to the lingering traces of prejudice which, sadly, continue as a legacy of the enslavement of Africans. I also commend the complementary initiative led by the CARICOM States to establish a permanent memorial at the United Nations to the memory of all the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, and I call on all Member States and the international community to provide all-out support for this memorial.
>
> "This year's commemoration, with its theme, 'Expressing our freedom through culture', underscores one of the many approaches of the resistance movement which the enslaved Africans employed to eventually bring an end to this heinous crime. Throughout the Americas, the enslaved Africans, despite their horrendous conditions, were able to preserve aspects of their culture which continue to this day, as manifested in music, song, dance, language, cuisine and sports.
>
> "We welcome the special significance attached to this year's commemoration, which is dedicated to Haiti as the first successful result of the resistance of the enslaved, which overthrew the forces of oppression and cast aside the shackles of slavery, bringing an end to the rule of the masters. We must pay special tribute to the leaders of the Haitian revolution, Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines and others, who, by their revolutionary action, ushered in the demise of slavery in the Caribbean, South America and the United States, and forced the breaking of the silence on this horror.
>
> "The slave trade is among the worst violations of human rights in history. Due to its

duration, its scale and the legitimization that was accorded to it, the transatlantic slave trade is unique, maybe the first example of globalization. We should never forget that this was the biggest deportation in history. Slave trade and slavery have affected all continents and have caused great upheavals that have impacted modern societies. It is unfortunate and totally unacceptable that in this age we are still struggling to confront slavery and slave trade and its various manifestations, such as human trafficking. The slogan 'Never again' therefore needs to be transformed into action and visible results. That will be the best homage to the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade."

I now give the floor to the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, Mr. Kiyotaka Akasaka, who will deliver a statement on behalf of the Secretary-General.

Mr. Akasaka (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information): I am very honoured to deliver the following message on behalf of the Secretary-General.

"Slavery is abhorrent. It is explicitly prohibited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the United Nations has reaffirmed this principle many times, including in the Durban Declaration, adopted at the 2001 World Conference against Racism. But slavery and slavery-like practices continue in many parts of the world. Slavery is mutating and re-emerging in modern forms, including debt bondage, the sale of children and the trafficking of women and girls for sex. Its roots lie in ignorance, intolerance and greed.

"We must create a climate in which such abuse and cruelty are inconceivable. One way is by remembering the past and honouring the victims of the transatlantic slave trade. By reminding ourselves of past injustices, we help to ensure that such systematic abuse of human rights can never be repeated.

"Those who controlled the transatlantic slave trade made huge profits from death, misery and exploitation. They presided over the forcible removal of millions of people from their homelands in Africa. Slave traders and owners subjected these forced migrants and their descendants to the most callous physical, mental and emotional abuse.

"We see the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade in all the countries it affected. If we are wise, we would use this legacy for good. We will recognize that it is clear evidence of what can happen if intolerance, racism and greed are allowed to triumph.

"We should also take heart from those who, with great courage, succeeded in ending this institutionalized abuse. Their bravery ensured the eventual triumph of the values the United Nations represents: tolerance, justice and respect for the dignity and worth of all human beings.

"Today we salute all the victims of slavery, and we commit ourselves to ensuring that this practice, in all its forms, is eradicated."

The Acting President: I thank the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information for reading out the message from the Secretary-General.

Before proceeding further, I should like to consult Member States about inviting our keynote speaker, Professor Tony Bogues of Brown University, to make a statement on this occasion. If there is no objection, may I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly, without setting a precedent, to invite Professor Tony Bogues of Brown University to make a statement at this special commemorative meeting?

It was so decided.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Equatorial Guinea, who will speak on behalf of the Group of African States.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the African Group on this important occasion of commemorating the anniversary of the abolition of transatlantic slavery.

I wish to convey our sincere appreciation to our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean Community for sustaining the momentum generated by their initiative in 2007, for which the African Group maintains its full and unconditional support.

Slave trade and slavery remain one of the most horrific, painful and brutal chapters, in the history not only of Africa alone, but of mankind as a whole.

Slavery and slave trade are crimes against humanity. They are at the heart of profound social and economic inequalities, hatred, intolerance, racism and prejudice which continue to affect people of African descent in many parts of the world. It is in this regard that measures aimed at countering the continued impact of slavery and slave trade, as provided for, inter alia, in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of 2001 and the outcome document of the Durban Review Conference of 2009, are relevant and valid.

As we commemorate the end of slavery and honour the memory of the innocent victims of these heinous crimes, we need also to be mindful of the contemporary forms of slavery, in all its manifestations. We must work together and use this event to renew our resolve to eliminate these new forms of slavery, which constitute blatant violations of human rights.

I wish to recall that in 2007, when we first commemorated this anniversary in the General Assembly, there was overwhelming support for the initiative, as well as strong condemnation of slavery and the slave trade. That momentum must be sustained. We need to continue with education and outreach programmes to ensure that this part of our history is not forgotten. In this regard, I wish to commend the Committee of Permanent Representatives and the Department of Public Information for their outreach efforts.

One way to sustain expanded outreach efforts is the erection of a permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and slave trade. We therefore welcome the initiative being led by States members of the Caribbean Community and the African Union in this regard. We further recognize the importance and necessity of sustained voluntary contributions in order to achieve, in a timely manner, the goals behind erecting the permanent memorial, and urge the international community to translate the support it has voiced into tangible contributions to the Trust Fund. Let us say "never again".

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Afghanistan, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Asian States.

Mr. Ayoob (Afghanistan): It is my honour to speak on behalf of the Asian Group as we gather here to observe the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

The transatlantic slave trade persisted for four centuries. That is longer than most of our nations have existed. It forever changed the landscape of the world, not only for those who were ripped from their homes and transplanted thousands of miles away over the course of generations, but also for those who bear the legacy of those centuries today, in the Americas, in Africa and in Europe.

It is therefore both fitting and just that we dedicate ourselves this year and every year to improving awareness not just of the manifold tragedies of the slave trade, but also of the breadth and magnificence of human strength in the face of terrible adversity. The struggles of these hundreds of thousands of men and women are at the very heart of this Organization, an Organization dedicated to the principles of peace, sovereignty and the fundamental equality of all men and women.

In this regard, I have the honour to thank His Excellency the Secretary-General, UNESCO and the United Nations Secretariat for their efforts to educate and spread awareness of the causes and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade and the need to address the racism and inequality that still exist today as a result. It is our hope that this Organization can lead the world in memorializing not only the suffering, but also the courage, of those who bravely dedicated their lives to restoring human dignity and guaranteeing equality among all.

Though thankfully the transatlantic trade in human beings has ended, injustice, racism and exploitation remain real and terrible problems all over the world. We should intensify our efforts to address discrimination, racism and social marginalization in line with the Durban Declaration.

Let us find inspiration in the strength of our ancestors in order to fearlessly confront these modern-day tragedies with the same courage and dedication so as to ensure that generations of tomorrow will enjoy a world that truly embodies the ideals enshrined in our Organization.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ukraine, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. Sergeyev (Ukraine): It is a particular honour for my delegation to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States at this special

commemorative meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 62/122, designating 25 March as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, we have been gathering every year to remember the more than 20 million people who suffered from the barbaric and inhuman practice of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Today's commemoration also gives us an opportunity to pay tribute to the courage and moral strength of all those who campaigned for the abolition of slavery.

There is still a substantial knowledge gap about the 400-year-long slave trade and its lasting consequences throughout the world, including the important contributions made by slaves to the development of societies in the lands of their enslavement. As States Members of the United Nations that have solemnly pledged to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and the dignity of human beings, we must never forget the tragic reality and consequences of slavery.

We want to thank the Secretary-General for his continued efforts in developing an educational outreach strategy to increase awareness and to educate future generations about the causes, consequences, lessons and legacy of the 400-year-long slave trade.

By learning about the past, young generations can fully understand the present and prepare a better future together in a world free of all types of enslavement, injustice, discrimination and prejudice. They must also be alert to every violation of human rights and make it their duty to act to prevent all future transgressions against any people.

We should also like to recognize and commend the leadership of Jamaica. The members of the Group of Eastern European States were honoured to support General Assembly resolution 64/15, "Permanent memorial to and remembrance of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade", and welcome the appointment of a Goodwill Ambassador to help raise awareness of the legacy of slavery.

Today's commemorative event also serves as a reminder that not all shadows of slavery have been banished. Even today, millions of human beings are subjected to practices that fall within the United Nations definition of enslavement. As the United Nations Member States, we must be vigilant in opposing all modern forms of slavery, including trafficking in persons. We should unite our efforts, in partnership with international organizations, civil society and the private sector, in order to put an end to the heinous crime that shames all of us.

We have gathered here today to remember those who suffered from slavery and to honour all those who helped to put an end to it. Let us draw wisdom from those lessons of the past to guide us in the future.

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to the representative of the next regional group, I now invite Ms. Elsie Laurence-Chounoune to read out an extract from the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano, known as Gustavus Vassa, the African.

Ms. Laurence-Chounoune: My name is Elsie Laurence-Chounoune and I am a staff member from Haiti, and I am also President of the Haitian Association at the United Nations.

It is my special honour and privilege to play a role in this solemn event that means so much to the entire world, especially the descendants of the direct victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

We have read, heard and watched personal accounts of the tragic system of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which continued for 400 years — 400 years. Today, we shall hear the account of an 11-year-old child, who experienced the anguish of abduction, the middle passage, abuse, fear, physical and mental torture and the ritual of a name change that impacted his identity. His name was Olaudah Equiano, also known as Gustavus Vassa, the African. This is the story.

> "We are almost a nation of dancers, musicians and poets. Thus, every great event, such as a triumphant return from battle or other cause of public rejoicing, is celebrated in public dances, which are accompanied with songs and music suited to the occasion. The assembly is separated into four divisions, which dance either apart or in succession, and each with a character peculiar to itself.... We have many musical instruments, particularly drums of different kinds, a piece of music which resembles a guitar, and another much like a stickado. These last are

chiefly used by betrothed virgins, who play on them on all grand festivals.

"As our manners are simple, our luxuries are few. The dress of both sexes is nearly the same. It generally consists of a long piece of calico, or muslin, wrapped loosely round the body, somewhat in the form of a highland plaid. This is usually dyed blue, which is our favourite colour ...

"...

"Our land is uncommonly rich and fruitful, and produces all kinds of vegetables in great abundance. We have plenty of Indian corn, and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture; and are about the size of the largest sugar-loaf and finely flavoured. We have also spices of different kinds, particularly pepper. ... All our industry is exerted to improve those blessings of nature. Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. ... Everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars.

"...

"... As I was the youngest of the sons, I became, of course, the greatest favourite of my mother, and was always with her. ... I was trained up from my earliest years in the art of war; my daily exercise was shooting and throwing javelins; and my mother adorned me with emblems, after the manner of our greatest warriors. In this way I grew up till I was turned the age of eleven, when an end was put to my happiness ... Generally, when the grown people in the neighbourhood were gone far in the fields to labour, the children assembled together in some of the neighbours' premises to play, and commonly some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant or kidnapper that might come upon us; for they sometimes took those opportunities of our parents' absence to attack and carry off as many as they could seize. ... But, alas! ere long it was my fate to be thus attacked and carried off ... One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both and, without giving us time to cry out or make resistance, they stopped our mouths and ran off with us into the nearest wood. Here, they tied our hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could ... When we went to rest the following night, they offered us some victuals; but we refused it, and the only comfort we had was in being in one another's arms all that night and bathing each other with our tears. But, alas! we were soon deprived of even the small comfort of weeping together. The next day proved a day of greater sorrow than I had yet experienced, for my sister and I were then separated while we lay clasped in each other's arms. It was in vain that we besought them not to part us; she was torn from me and immediately carried away while I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days I did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth. ...

"...

"The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits and that they were going to kill me. Their complexion differing so much from ours, their long hair and the language they spoke (which was very different from any I had heard) united to confirm me in this belief. ... When I looked round the ship too and saw a large furnace or copper boiling and a multitude of black people of every description chained together, every one of their countenances expressing dejection and sorrow, I no longer doubted of my fate; and, quite overpowered with horror and anguish, I fell motionless on the deck and fainted. ... At last, when the ship we were in, had got in all her cargo, they made ready with many fearful noises, and we were all put under deck so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had

been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number on the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died, thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now become insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable."

Those are the words of an 11-year-old child, in the middle of a nightmare. Let us think about that for a moment. But he survived and overcame this ordeal. Equiano's survival instinct was characteristic of that of millions of other enslaved people who succeeded in breaking free from their shackles.

I shall now read to the Assembly a short extract from a poem capturing the last battle of Vertières, which freed Haiti from slavery. This poem, entitled "Vertières", was written by a famous Haitian poet named Massillon Coicou.

(*spoke in French*)

"They are here, the heroes of the Adige and the Rhine;
They have surrounded Bréda, Pierre-Michel, and Champin and Vertières
With their canons of bronze:
And these mounts flanked by murderous mouths,
These improvised forts, are hereby condemned
To annihilate all these obstinate blacks.

"But still the native army holds strong
In the belief it can take, in but one leap,
The innumerable obstacles, and go, swiftly,
All the way to the gates of the Cape to raise its standard!
Vertières, above all, is here; it is Vertières,
That will hinder the marvellous leap of the native army.

"There, like a proud eagle with its piercing gaze,
The tricolour flies, threatening;
Here, the blacks, spread all across the plain;
The blacks, so many — crowding, eager, breathless,
Surging with the desire to shed the light of the
Flame of reality upon their dark beautiful dream!

"Dessalines appears. Calm, he plans, he aligns:
And then around him casting his eagle's eye,
He orders Capois under the cannons.
(O! Whoever you may be, hear these names,

"The most divine embodiment of heroism!)
Capois leapt. Under him, driven by the noble pride
That imbues every man down to his soul,
The legions of blacks push on to their goal.

"The cannon-fire roars and crushes them; they panic And pull back; Capois reinspires them; their courage redoubles
And, relentless, onward to the fort,
Capois inspires them to scorn death.

"They go.
Look at them! Stoic and magnificent,
Wounded, riddled, bleeding, their numbers swell under the
Ceaseless cannonburst spewing from Vertières,
A miracle dazzling the eyes of the enemy!
They need to take out Charrier — the inaccessible;
But, still, before them, the impassable colossus,
Formidable, wild, never-ending,
Still, in its ravine, Vertières remains standing!
The cannon-fire roars. An immense breach
Splits the attackers, but the ranks regroup,
And prouder still, more beautiful, bayonets raised,
En masse, they continue still, falling, but not giving in
And amid the waves on waves of shell and gunshot,
When death passes, blind, crushing these walls of the living,
O! so many, and thousands more, are here to
Remake the magical scene,
Re-form the wall and strive onwards.
O! imagine
Freedom! It is for you — it is to adorn a temple
Worthy of your splendour on this sky-blue isle.

It is to offer you their worship and devote their honour

"That these souls, drenched in shadows and despair,
Write their epic tale as fire rains down!
On your tablets of engraved bronze, O! Freedom,
Those fashioned by the demigods of noble antiquity,
Engrave the memory of these epic hours
When, armed with his own irons and with spades,
The black leapt, springing from his nothingness,
And took his last giant step!

"And you, O! black people, sing! ... This day
For you a new destiny does bring!"

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Panama, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States.

Mr. Thalassinós (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". Such a fundamental humanitarian principle takes on special meaning on a day such as today, when we observe the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Today we pause to pay tribute to the millions of Africans who were violently removed from their native lands and subjected to slavery — something that must not be forgotten. But we must also pay tribute to the extraordinary legacy contributed to our societies by populations of African descent. And we must reaffirm our commitment to promoting social equality for populations of African descent in our societies, as well as combating racial discrimination elsewhere in the world.

Slavery and the transatlantic slave trade rank among the worst violations of human rights in human history. We must educate and inform present and future generations in order to raise awareness of the causes and consequences of the 400 years of the slave trade. We must continue strengthening the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and promote the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in order to highlight the dangers of racism and prejudice so that future generations understand the historical lessons and consequences of the slave trade. The positive cultural heritage of freedom is also worthy of celebration by all of humanity.

The States members of the Latin American and Caribbean Group participate vigorously in this commemoration and request that all States Members of the United Nations contribute to the Trust Fund for the permanent memorial and participate actively, at the national and international levels, in the activities taking place this week.

This year, the commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade focuses on a central theme that underscores the efforts of enslaved peoples to resist their captors' attempts to rob them completely of their identity. These efforts are reflected in the safeguarding of original elements of their cultural heritage through the retention of belief systems, oral traditions, social values, music, dance, art, food, folklore and religious practices and festivals, resulting in a vibrant mixture of cultural expression.

As we reflect on the theme of this commemorative day, "Expressing our freedom through culture", we celebrate the continuing and central relevance of this cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation as a medium of identity and, ultimately, as a celebration of freedom from slavery.

At the same time, it is our duty to resolve to end for future generations the legacy of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice that is the result of slavery. To that end, we pause today to remember those who lived and died under the system of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade, which we must not forget.

Finally, we pay tribute to the Haitian people, who today are suffering from terrible human and natural calamities, for Haiti was the first republic in Latin America and the Caribbean to achieve independence and to decree the abolition of slavery.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Germany, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States.

Mr. Wittig (Germany): It is a particular honour for my delegation to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Group of Western European and other States as we gather today to commemorate the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade.

Slavery is a disgrace for humankind. It is one of the most fundamental attacks imaginable against human rights and human dignity. Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explicitly states that "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms".

Today we pay tribute to the millions of victims of the transatlantic slave trade who were forcibly removed from their homelands in Africa and subjected to the most cruel physical and mental abuse, exploitation and, very often, death. Theirs is a story of abuse and suffering that lasted almost 400 years. I am glad we just heard the impressive and strong testimony of a child victim, which was read out by our friend from Haiti just a couple of moments ago.

It is in the memory of the victims that we reaffirm our resolve to remember the injustices committed and to ensure that they will never be forgotten. As States Members of the United Nations, we have the obligation to inform and to educate future generations about the causes and consequences of the transatlantic slave trade and to make sure that such an atrocious and systematic abuse of human rights will never happen again.

Sadly, even today, slavery-like practices continue. Even today, the abhorrent practice of turning one's fellow human being into a commodity to be sold for a profit continues. Modern forms of slavery — such as trafficking in persons and human organs, sexual slavery, child labour, forced marriage and the sale of children — continue to persist in many parts of the world.

Today's victims of contemporary forms of slavery tend to belong to the poorest and most vulnerable and marginalized social groups in their respective societies. Very often, they do not have the power to defend their rights because of fear, ignorance or vulnerability. It is therefore all the more important that we, the States Members of the United Nations, speak out on their behalf. We must join forces to defend human rights and human dignity in all circumstances.

Today we pay tribute to the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, but let us learn from the past. Let us commit to create a future in which slavery in all its forms is eradicated and in which the human dignity of every human being is respected in all parts of the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United States, the host country.

Mr. Barton (United States of America): It is a great honour for me today to recall the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade: the more than 10 million men, women and children who, chained in darkness, hungry and sick, were taken across the Atlantic Ocean and into bondage, often to my own country's shores. On the anniversary of the day in 1807 when the British Empire outlawed the slave trade, we recommit ourselves to achieving universal human rights and delivering on the promise of freedom. We do so while mindful of the cruelties of the past and determined to confront the injustices of the present.

Slavery continues in pernicious forms today. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that more than 200,000 children are forced to wield weapons in conflict, 5 million are bonded labourers and another million, mainly girls, are forced into prostitution. The IOM reports that hundreds of thousands of people of all ages are trafficked across borders and into slavery each year. That must end, and the actions we must take to end slavery and trafficking are clear.

Together, we must protect victims, fully implement existing laws against trafficking and prosecute traffickers. With improved victim identification, stronger medical and social services and increased public awareness, the men, women and children who have suffered this scourge can overcome the bonds of modern slavery, receive protection and justice and reclaim their rights and liberties.

Today, as we recommit ourselves to ending slavery and human trafficking, we should take inspiration from those who broke the shackles and stood up to cruelty in generations past. We must carry on their struggle to ensure the triumph of our shared values: tolerance, justice and respect for the dignity, common humanity and freedom of all human beings. We must carry on their struggle until every human being is free.

The Acting President: I shall now invite Ms. Lawri Lala Moore, President of the United Nations Jazz Society, to perform a musical recital.

Ms. Moore: I am African American; the guitarist who is accompanying me is from Zambia. We are going to do a song entitled "Strange Fruit".

The members of the General Assembly heard a musical performance.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, who will speak on behalf of the Caribbean Community and also introduce our featured speaker.

Mr. Gonsalves (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I have the distinct honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the 14 member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

One of the greatest artists of our Caribbean civilization, the late Robert Nesta Marley, once sang in his song "Slave Driver":

> "Every time I hear the crack of a whip
> My blood runs cold.
> I remember on the slave ship
> How they brutalized my very soul."

It is that brutalization that brings us together on this International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade for, as Bob Marley makes clear, the slave ship was beyond an indignity. It was beyond barbarism. It was beyond inhuman. It was, apart from the physical atrocities, a brutalization of the psyche of a people so violent and enduring that it has created a shared cultural memory of the trauma — a collective memory that lives so vividly in the souls of those who have died that it is bequeathed to those of us who live today and to those yet unborn. For the CARICOM member States at the United Nations, it is a scar that is 14 countries wide and 400 years deep. For the world, it remains a festering sore on the conscience of humanity.

That scar on our Caribbean soul remains to this day a noise in our blood and an echo in our bones. It is given voice and flesh every day through our cultural expressions, each of which is shaped and informed by this peculiar legacy. You hear in the words that we speak and in our songs of struggle and freedom. You see it in the way that we dress and the way that we move. You taste in the foods we eat. You recognize it in the similarities and surviving traditions between our brothers and sisters on the African continent and their violently uprooted kin. You feel it in a Caribbean civilization that instinctively and comprehensively rejects oppression, subjugation and exploitation, even as the descendants of enslaved Africans, slavemasters and indentured labourers have managed to miraculously and triumphantly craft a peaceful and harmonious societal fabric from the disparate threads of brutality, misery and rebellion. As the theme of this year's remembrance activities recognizes, our vibrant culture, in and of itself, is an eloquent expression of our hard-won freedom.

CARICOM member States are grateful for our continuing partnership with the African Union, the wider United Nations membership and the United Nations Secretariat, particularly the Department of Public Information, and for their support of this annual recognition and honour of the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. Draft decision A/64/L.50, adopted today, represents the strength of the global consensus regarding the importance of this International Day of Remembrance.

Similarly, CARICOM wishes to highlight the central importance of resolution 64/15, which welcomes CARICOM's initiative to erect, at a place of prominence at United Nations Headquarters, a permanent memorial in acknowledgement of the tragedy and in consideration of the legacy of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The central importance of that initiative to CARICOM cannot be overstated. We encourage Member States to assist in the construction of the permanent memorial through contributions to the Trust Fund for the permanent memorial, which is administered by the United Nations Office for Partnerships.

We are most grateful to those States that have already contributed to the fund and especially thankful to those that have made multiple pledges and contributions. In that regard, CARICOM offers special commendations to the Government and the people of India, who have demonstrated noteworthy and particular generosity in their support of this effort.

The slave ship, and the systematic and abhorrent exploitation that it represents, can never be forgotten. Today, we honour the memory of the victims of the slave trade — those who perished on the journey and those black survivors who triumphed over unimaginable adversity to shape new independent nations of free men and women. We pay special tribute this year to Haiti, the first nation to break the shackles of subjugation and the enduring seat of our Caribbean strength and pride. As our Haitian brothers and sisters confront the catastrophe of recent earthquakes, we have no doubt that, with the help of the international

community, they will triumph, as they have triumphed over all prior adversities. We in CARICOM also salute the memory of the indigenous peoples of our region — the Arawak, the Kalinago and the Garifuna inhabitants — whose tales of extermination through disease and genocide are also entwined with our own redemption song.

According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's statement today, "those who controlled the transatlantic slave trade made huge profits from death, misery and exploitation" (*supra*). Their profit was our tragic loss, both on the African continent and throughout its far-flung diaspora. That loss is a debt that remains unpaid on humanity's ledger book. Today's event and future remembrances represent the tiniest of down payments on that historical debt. This day also stands as a rebuke to those who profited, those who ignored and those who justified the horrors of slavery and the slave trade. Today, we honour, we remember and we shall never forget.

It is also be my distinct honour and pleasure, on behalf of CARICOM, to introduce the keynote speaker for this special commemorative event, Mr. Barrymore Anthony Bogues. To do justice to Mr. Bogues's impressive and extensive experience would require far more time than is allocated to me today. With apologies to Mr. Bogues for the necessary brevity, I shall sketch some of his tremendous accomplishments in academia, politics and culture.

Mr. Bogues is Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University in Rhode Island, where he has taught since 1999. Professor Bogues has also lectured at Howard University in Washington, D.C., the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, Dartmouth College and the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where he is now an honorary research professor.

Professor Bogues's scholarship operates at the intersections of political theory, intellectual history, cultural studies, literary theory and philosophy, and he has found this intersection to be a busy one indeed. He has authored four books, with another four soon to be published. He has written scores of articles in scholarly journals and has made over 100 distinguished lectures and presentations to special conferences, including lectures on slavery, abolition and post-colonial societies.

Professor Bogues, who was a special assistant to former Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley, is the recipient of countless awards for scholarship and instruction, including the Brown University Presidential Citation, a Royce Family Professorship in Teaching Excellence and the Middle Atlantic Writers Association Distinguished Writer Award, to name but a few.

It is also appropriate, given Mr. Bogues's extensive scholarship in the areas of Caribbean culture, particularly music, and his work in visual media, that he is with us today as we express our freedom through culture. Without any further ado, I would like to introduce Professor Tony Bogues.

The Acting President: In accordance with the decision taken earlier, I now give the floor to Professor Tony Bogues of Brown University.

Mr. Bogues: I would like to begin my remarks this afternoon with words of tribute to Professor Rex Nettleford, who delivered the inaugural keynote lecture at the 2007 commemoration at the General Assembly.

Professor Nettleford was not only Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, where I studied and taught for some years, but also an individual whose vision and institutional capacities were central to cultural and educational institution-building in the Caribbean. Besides, he was an extraordinary intellectual and creative artist, one whose work on history, politics and various aspects of African diaspora cultural forms have left us with a formidable legacy.

Of special note to us here was his work on the UNESCO Slave Route Project. One of his many felicitous phrases was his naming of the slave plantations as the "cane-piece", to describe the contemporary traces upon the social, political and cultural life of plantation slavery in the Americas. If members will permit me, I would like to dedicate these remarks to him.

We are here today at perhaps one of most complex moments in our modern history as a human species. Over the last decade or so, we have witnessed legal, political and philosophical debates about historical episodes that continue to haunt our world. Of course many of these debates have a genealogy that can be traced back to the post-1945 period and the attempt of the world community to think and act against genocide. In these debates, we were grappling with the relationship of justice to historical wrongs.

In our recent memory, perhaps one of the most spectacular instances of this debate and its concrete implications was the truth and reconciliation process in South Africa. That experience has illustrated to us that history is not a faded memorial fact; nor it is simply just the past. We understand better today how the traces of history congeal into structural legacies to which we must pay attention.

We can readily acknowledge that the world today is a different place than it was in 1945. It was the December 1960 United Nations Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples that established the formal international political framework for the self-government of over 700 million inhabitants of this planet.

But what the United Nations declared in 1960 was a status already achieved in a single Caribbean territory, 156 years before, when Jean-Jacques Dessalines transformed the French colony of Saint Domingue into Haiti. The 1805 Haitian Constitution, which followed the 1804 declaration of political independence, abolished slavery forever and attempted to eradicate all of the 128 distinctions based on colour that had organized the colony's economic, social and cultural life. And that Constitution asserted that, now, all Haitians citizens were black, including the Poles, Germans and white women who had remained faithful to the cause of the revolution.

This particular article overthrew the then-dominant hierarchical conceptions of human beings as racially classifiable through biology, skin shade and phenotype. The Constitution therefore was an extraordinary achievement. It was in many ways the zenith of a revolutionary war against a social system in which human beings were deemed, as the Caribbean historian Elsa Goveia so eloquently remarked, "property in persons".

This war against slavery had many roots and branches, as the Haitian historian Jean Fouchard makes clear. The various Maroon struggles crystallised in a revolutionary war against the slavery of the French colonial State in 1791. The names that we honour today and others that have been silenced by the frames through which we tell historical narratives beckon us to reflect on this commemorative occasion: an occasion to remember the victims of slavery and the transatlantic slave trade. The names of Toussaint Louverture, Sans-Souci, Macaya, Fatima, Boukman and Macandal, however, beckon us not so much to reflect on the victims of slavery, but perhaps to reflect on the ideas of freedom that emerged and were produced by the ex-slaves of Haiti.

Oftentimes, in reflecting upon Atlantic slavery, we use the word "tragedy" to describe the human horrors of that social, political and economic system. But when we think of an event as tragic, we often imagine it as a singular one that causes great suffering and distress. We then see the event as a little out of the ordinary, something to be quickly healed without paying due attention to its consequences. In addition, when we create a memory about tragedy, in terms of the Atlantic slave trade, we focus on whips and lashes and the apparatuses of power and domination that marked human flesh. And these we must never forget. For the pain of the lash, the whipping, the capacity of one to place another under the rule of arbitrary individual will, to make another person non-human, to create a living corpse, a living dead — all these things we recall because they must never occur again.

But in recalling them, we might also want to name them. So, what should we name Atlantic racial slavery? What should we name the system in which millions of Africans became captives and then slaves in the Atlantic world? Yes, it was tragic. But was it a single event? Atlantic racial slavery operated as a system of human domination for over four centuries. It was an historical event of *longue durée*, producing and reproducing itself as a complete social system. Such a system of continuous human domination is an historical process that is of catastrophic proportions. Now, processes of historical catastrophe do begin in an original event, which then becomes repeatable. In this regard, racial slavery was a repeatable event over a lengthy historical period. As such, it then became the generative act of societies, shaping their contours.

Within the process of historical catastrophe, the boundaries of time are porous, because historical catastrophic events leave traces, and the act of memory becomes a conscious one that strives to impose order on the fragments of history. There is, however, one foundational feature of all historical catastrophic events. It is the overarching drive of power to reduce human beings to a nothingness. It is the drive, in the words of Hannah Arendt, to make the "human" in the human being superfluous. Or as Frantz Fanon remarks, it is a drive to create zones of non-being for the human. This drive to abduct the human from being human, to create conditions in which the human is obliterated so

that violence, cruelty and various forms of torture become norms: these are the signs and ways of life that mark the historical catastrophic event.

But historical processes never produce just one thing. They are always complex and multifaceted, and it is from this perspective that I wish to make brief remarks on freedom and the dual Haitian revolutions. When we think about events in the Caribbean colony of Saint Domingue between 1791 and 1804, we tend to do so with a general sweep and call them the Haitian revolution. This makes it easy for us, but such a simple naming might obscure the profound world significance of the events in Saint Domingue and then in Haiti. The dual revolution was, in the words of the late Jamaican Prime Minister Michael Manley, a hinge of history.

When the first major outbreak began in the northern region of Saint Domingue, the Atlantic world was dominated by plantation life and racial slavery. There had been many slave revolts, but this was the first rebellion that had become a revolution.

Many historians, including the Trinidadian C. L. R. James in his now-classic *The Black Jacobins*, have argued about the relative weight and influence upon the dual revolution of the ideas of the French revolution, Ki-Kongo political ideas or the Mande Charter in West Africa, which inaugurated a regime of universal human rights after the Arab slave traders were expelled from Mali. That Charter, which proclaimed that every human life is a life, politically rethought the basis on which rights could be organized. The Charter proclaimed that rights should be organized on the basis of human life, not on the basis of citizenship or political obligation.

I think that that it is safe to say that all three streams, as well as the concepts and practices of voodoo, influenced the outcome and the shape of the Haitian revolution.

However, it was the experiences of the slaves, of being property in the person, of being a corpse that speaks while having all the requirements of politics, that is of speech, that shaped the horizons of the ex-slave and the possibilities of freedom. It was a possibility so distinctive that one French colonial official remarked in consternation, "the blacks have their own philosophy of freedom".

It is accurate to see the revolution as having two distinct and related phases. The first phase ends with the declaration of the 1801 Constitution promulgated by Toussaint Louverture, which declares the end of slavery and of the declaration of dominion status for the colony. Napoleon was of course not having any of this, and as he wrote to the English foreign minister in 1801,

> "[In] the course which I have taken of annihilating the black government at [Saint Domingue] I have been less guided by considerations of commerce and finance than by the necessity of stifling in every part of the world disquiet. ... If not done so, the sceptre of the new world would sooner or later [have] fallen into the hands of the blacks."

The first phase of the Haitian revolution therefore had to be stopped in order not to encourage the idea of black self-government. We are, of course, aware of the rest of the story: that Toussaint Louverture was taken to France and died in one of Napoleon's jails. His removal from the ex-slave colony opened up new forms of struggle against the French colonial Power, and in that violent struggle the French Army was defeated and the colony became independent Haiti.

So, there were two revolutions, one against slavery and the other against colonial domination. Both were related, and for the Haitians the struggle for political independence was a guarantee against any return to slavery.

But after slavery and independence, what new ways of life were possible? What would freedom look like? This has been a difficult question to answer, but I think we can safely say that two concerns animated the ex-slaves.

The first one had to do with the form of labour itself. Who should own the products of one's labour? How should one use the surpluses of one's labour? How should that be determined? This was a knotty issue raised by the dual Haitian revolution and one that was never fully answered, but it was posed when many of the ex-slaves opposed the labour codes established both by the French colonial Government and then in 1801 by Toussaint Louverture himself. From the inception of wage labour as a form of human activity, this question of the relationship of labour to freedom has been a knotty one. Because of their experiences of being property in the person, the ex-slaves grappled with this thorny issue, although they may not have provided the answers we are looking for.

The second question they posed was this: What should freedom look like? Was freedom to be an ideal and therefore something to striven for and then actualized? Could one separate the conditions for freedom from freedom itself? The answer to this question came very quickly in the dual Haitian revolution. For the ex-slaves, freedom as a human activity was about overcoming obstacles, it was about having the capacity to act, and in the final analysis it was about human creativity. Human rights were foundation-stones, yes. But by themselves — without the capacity to create, to make one's self and community — they could not be realized.

These were the issues that this dual revolution placed before human consciousness and our history. The dual Haitian revolution began to be isolated and strangled as Thomas Jefferson reversed the initial United States position, and when, as the price of diplomatic recognition, France demanded payment of over 100 million gold francs. This was then followed by external occupation by the United States in the early twentieth century. These external conditions created internal difficulties for Haiti and would make the ordinary Haitian ask: In the end, what kind of "free" is this?

Because the dual Haitian revolution posed these questions about freedom, the revolution was of world significance. No other revolution of the period, neither the American nor the French, posed these issues. It would seem to me that in commemorating and remembering the Atlantic slave trade with a focus on Haiti, we would not want to reframe Haiti as an outcast nation of the West, but rather embrace its historical contribution to human freedom as one central element in the making of the modern world.

From that perspective, how we frame the rebuilding of Haiti after the disaster of 12 January 2010 is a critical question. Do we continue with more of the same? For instance, do we continue policies that, everyone now agrees, impacted adversely on the rice industry of Haiti, forcing thousands of Haitians into Port-au-Prince? Or do we frame policy along the lines of an equitable, just and interdependent society?

In the end, the memory of the ex-slaves and their historical achievements beckons the international community to rethink policies of trade, of aid, of what constitutes economic development, of how to tackle the question of global inequities. Perhaps once again in this instance, as we rethink these issues, Haiti may lead the way.

The Acting President: I now invite Ms. Kaissa Doumbe Moulongo and Mr. Anthony Cedras to present a musical performance.

The members of the General Assembly heard a musical performance.

The Acting President: The General Assembly has thus concluded the commemorative meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

May I take it that the General Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 116?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 4.45 p.m.